

VZCZCXRO9521  
OO RUEHGA RUEHHA RUEHQU RUEHVC  
DE RUEHOT #3473/01 3312123  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 272123Z NOV 06  
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4512  
INFO RUCNCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO IMMEDIATE 1599  
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE  
RHEFHLC/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 003473

SIPDIS

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA CAN, CA/PPT, DHS FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2016  
TAGS: [CA](#) [CPAS](#) [CVIS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#)  
SUBJECT: WHTI IMPLEMENTATION: CANADA STILL HOPING FOR A  
REPRIEVE

Classified By: POLMINCOUNS Brian Flora. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C/NF) SUMMARY: Comments and statements from a variety of Canadian interlocutors, coupled with Canada's apparent lack of serious preparations, indicate that the government will continue to lobby to delay, alter, or kill the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). WHTI is viewed negatively, almost emotionally, by most Canadians, and the minority Conservative government doesn't seem to have the stomach or the political capital to embrace it and sell it to a skeptical public. Many officials expect that the current implementation deadlines will be extended, and some now hope that, with the Democrats in control of Congress and chairing the relevant committees, Canada will be exempted from a program that successive Canadian governments (Liberal and Conservative) have opposed from the outset. Despite claiming to have a dual track policy (accepting the need to move forward while arguing for delays and flexible implementation), there is scant evidence of encouragement to the public to get the necessary travel documents, but ample evidence of active, well-orchestrated lobbying against the initiative. END SUMMARY

WHTI IMPLEMENTATION: SAY IT,S NOT TRUE, SAM  
-----

12. (C/NF) The message we are still getting from our private sector and official Canadian interlocutors, especially in the densely populated Ottawa-to-Windsor corridor in Ontario, is that WHTI implementation will be a disaster at the border, impeding commerce, damaging the economy, and causing major disruptions at busy crossings. Where we describe the ongoing process as streamlining or making a smart border smarter, their widely circulated talking points bemoan it as an unfortunate thickening of a border between friends. The recently announced possibility for a delay (until June 2009) for land border implementation, while welcomed, has not had much impact on their opposition to WHTI. Despite Mission Canada and Washington's public diplomacy efforts to get the word out regarding WHTI, the ramping up of passport issuance in the U.S., and plans to roll out Pass-Card, Canadians do not believe the U.S. can possibly be ready for on-time implementation, especially at the land borders. There is even skepticism regarding the upcoming January 2007 air implementation date, despite the fact that an estimated 70 to 80 percent of travelers already use passports for travel to the U.S. We note, in any case, if problems arise, the press (and politicians of all stripes) will be quick to blame Washington.

13. (C/NF) Though more circumspect, most of our official

interlocutors tend also to be skeptical. They are grasping for alternatives to the WHTI documentation requirements and are asking that we reassure the public that implementation will be phased in slowly and flexibly. Public Safety Minister Day, the lead minister on WHTI, took this approach with Secretary Chertoff at the November 15-16 Cross Border Crime Forum Ministerial. He again raised the issue of using drivers, licenses, possibly with enhanced security features, as a Canadian alternative to a passport or U.S. style Pass-Card, citing a proposed Washington State-British Columbia pilot project. Proportionately more Canadians than QColumbia pilot project. Proportionately more Canadians than Americans already have passports; but while the U.S. Passport Agency is cranking them out in record numbers, there are apparently no plans for a similar effort on the Canadian side to meet WHTI-generated demand. The Canadian Passport Office tells us that wait times are still under four weeks and that demand for passports has begun to climb, especially in Western Canada ( up 20 percent over last year). At least some of this is WHTI-driven. However, due to budgeting and procurement requirements, it will likely be another two years before Canada even starts producing the E-passports which have become the new ICAO standard. Even a partial quick-fix such as extending the validity of adult passports from five to ten years doesn't seem to be under serious consideration; nor is Ottawa expending much effort in getting the word out regarding the WHTI implementation process and deadlines. Many expect the implementation dates to be kicked further down the road and hold out hope that the new Democratic-controlled Congress will move in this direction, and may eventually exempt Canada from the WHTI requirement.

THE POLITICS OF WHTI: NO WINNERS IN THIS ONE  
-----

14. (C/NF) The Conservative minority government in Ottawa,

OTTAWA 00003473 002 OF 002

under heavy political attack over its combat role in Afghanistan, environmental policies, and Prime Minister Harper,s pro-Israel foreign policy tilt doesn,t seem to want to tackle WHTI, especially in the run-up to probable spring elections. WHTI is so unpopular that the government feels it cannot afford to endorse it publicly, or advocate a parallel documentation program on the Canadian side of the border. This would cost them votes and expose them to opposition criticism that, despite Harper,s perceived pro-American positions, he is unable to deliver on an issue that directly affects Canadians.

15. (C/NF) So, while Mission Canada and U.S. agencies charged with WHTI implementation are working overtime to lay the groundwork for a smooth road forward, the Canadian government and much of the affected private sector are wringing hands and hoping for further delays or even an exemption. Despite the Congressional decision to authorize an if-needed delay, many continue to lobby potential allies in the U.S. to undermine implementation. They are also quick to give undue weight to the comments of those who show sympathy or understanding for their opposition to WHTI. Our concern for some time is that the chaos the Canadians have been predicting will be self-fulfilling, if in large part due to their unwillingness to say the magic phrase to the Canadian public: get your passport.

Visit Canada's Classified Web Site at  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/ottawa>

WILKINS